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**A Preliminary Study of the Structure of Pagu Proverbs**

**Abstract:**

Pagu (also known to its speakers as ‘Isam’) is a West Papuan language spoken at the southeastern end of the North Halmahera peninsula. According to the research team from the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI) that conducted a project on documenting and revitalizing the language and culture of Pagu (2011 to 2014) nowadays Pagu is spoken by just half of the Pagu population (in 2012 there were 6,147 people living in 13 Pagu villages).

In Pagu, *peribahasa* or proverbs are known as *o demo ma daili* or literally ‘the language of examining’. This paper presents preliminary results of a study based mainly on 23 Pagu proverbs that were collected during a research trip with the LIPI team in June 2013. A number of stylistic, structural and semantic features of Pagu proverbs are discussed in this paper, including parallelism, simile and metaphor as well as the opposition of clauses and other elements. Simile is perhaps the most common feature of Pagu metaphors, and metaphor is also often found. Simile, where the similarity between two things is overtly marked by the use of *soka* ‘like’ is illustrated in (1) and metaphor (where no overt marker of similarity is employed) is illustrated in (2).

- (1) **Soka o kakaelasa ma gusuku na-sangaini**  
Like def crab poss hole 2SM-put.finger.in  
Lit.: like inserting your finger into a crab hole  
‘one knows the bad effect of doing something still s/he keeps on doing it’.
- (2) **O duriana gena ngalo ma ilesi nia-gogono**  
Def durian that although poss no.matter.how 2PS-hide  
**ma ka wa-ame-ka ma bounu**  
poss only 1PLINS.3NHO-smell-away.from.speaker poss odor  
Lit.: no matter how you hide the durian we will smell its odor  
‘no falsehoods, because soon or later it will be unfolded’

Universally, it is often found that proverbs consist of two descriptive elements (where one descriptive element consists at least of a topic and a comment). According to Dundes (1975) when there are two descriptive elements in one proverb, then their relationship must be either oppositional or non-oppositional. Six of the Pagu proverbs were found to have this bipartite structure, and all of them were oppositional. These are illustrated in (3) and (4).

- (3) **ai wola i-tiila ma ai sininga i-tiila-wa**  
1SPOSS house NHS-bad but 1SPOSS heart NHS-bad-NEG  
Lit.: my house is bad but my heart is not  
‘concern more to the personality not to the material’
- (4) **ngalo to-kilanga iti to-gilagilanga**  
Although 1SGS-slow main.thing 1SGS-safe  
Lit.: although I am slow the main thing is I am safe  
‘concern more on oneself safety’

These two examples are oppositional because each of the descriptive elements in each sentence is in contrast with each other as signified by the word *ma* ‘but’ in (3) and *ngalo* ‘although’ in (4).

This paper will review the range of different stylistic, structural and semantic features found in the Pagu proverbs so far.

**References:**

- Dundes, Alan. 1975. “On the structure of the proverb”. *Proverbium*, no. 25: 961-973.  
Hisyam, M, Dwi Purwoko, Usman, Dalan Peranginangin. 2012. “Bahasa Pagu: Vitalitas dan Pemertahanannya”. Unpublished paper. Jakarta: PMB-LIPI.